SAN FRANCISCO BAY GUARDIAN - 1/22/92

LETTERS

Stoned, again and again

Though J.H. Tompkins' infuriating and insipid cover story on Oliver Stone ["Man-child in Movieland," 1/1/92] inspired me to think this letter through, it was Garrison's speech at the end of *JFK* that inspired me to *write* it.

What truly disturbs me about Tompkins' article is not its careless writing (he left *Wall Street* out of his flippant "Films of Stone" critic-bytes but included *Dragon*). Rather, I find the implicit politics underlying the article's tone somewhat complicitous with a certain prevalent conservative, reactionary attitude; namely, that any artist today trying to make a statement on a controversial issue should be bashed — this time, not from the Helms wing, but from "hip" critics like Tompkins.

Aside from the presumptuous complaint about Stone that "the '60s weren't like that," the main revelation of Tompkins' article seems to be that Stone's films are commercial Hollywood films — they focus on individual heroism and depend on a good-evil plot structure — a rather banal and redundant observation. Considering *JFK*'s present company of infantile and/or violent fantasies (*Hook, Terminator 2, Star Trek IV, Addams Family*), it is clear that what distinguishes Stone's films, in spite of the Hollywood format, is his bold attempt to deal with issues no other Hollywood director (or politician, for that matter) would dare touch: the murderous lies of the U.S. government and the American myth they depend on (*Born on the Fourth of July*); the criminal greed of corporate America (*Wall Street*); even our own right-wing coup (*JFK*).

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I would like to comment on what, in my view, is the most reactionary article ever to appear in the Bay Guardian (so-called). During the anti-war movement in the '60s, people like myself would hear rumors about crazies who were wild and violent — who would do everything they could to incite violence and dissension among us. But until the Carter administration's Freedom of Information Act, we had no inkling of the extent of the subterfuge and provocation to violence that was carried out by the government in our midst to discredit us.

We found out that infiltration went beyond our wildest imaginings: Army intelligence teams disrupting the protests at the 1968 convention in Chicago, FBI surveillance of Martin Luther King Jr., dirty tricks against the George McGovern campaign, and COINTELPRO.

Since the Johnson administration, there has been one war after another in Vietnam, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Guatemala, Grenada, and Panama. Democracy has lost ground in many countries, including our own. Watergate, the Iran-Contra affair, October Surprise, and the BCCI scandal are the tips of the iceberg. Everyone deeply knows what was lost with the series of assassinations of John, Medgar, Robert, Martin, Malcolm, and all those murdered — from Kent State to Vietnam — on into Central America and Iraq.

Now we see an unprecedented media campaign against Oliver Stone, who has had the strength and resources to put the splintered elements together that we know, piece by piece, so well. Media representatives who can ignore the carnage of the last two decades would have younger generations believe that these many murders on the battlefield and at home are unrelated.

The Bay Guardian article was aimed at people too young to remember those days, creating doubt about Stone's message by attacking his character. But I remember. And I would like to add one more voice against those propagandists who offer Dan Quayle as the shining example of the '60s, and the CIA's George Bush as the figurehead of democracy. Oliver Stone is right. What has happened is our responsibility to remember and do our best to correct. We owe it to all those who have died as a result of our blindness.

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